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TO THE

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OF THE

DIOCESE OF BRISTOL,

AT THE

PRIMARY VISITATION

OF

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Henry Reginald, Lord Bishop of Bristol,

1796.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CLERGY.

B R I S T O L :

PRINTED BY J. RUDHALL, IN SMALL-STREET.

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Henry Reginald Lord Bishop of Bath

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RECEIVED - 11 OCT 1972
U.S. AIR FORCE - 11 OCT 1972

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE opportunity afforded of addressing you in this Place, must necessarily create considerable anxiety in the Person to whose lot it falls. Eminence and Distinction of all sorts carry with them something ensnaring to the human mind; and some attention will ever be requisite, to prevent their warping it from the proper Purposes for which they are given. In Ecclesiastical Matters these considerations come with redoubled force; and since the temporal advancement of Christianity it becomes certainly a matter of some difficulty so to enjoy distinction, and to exercise authority in it, as not to lose sight of its true and genuine Spirit. The first Object therefore towards which a Person filling the Situation to which his Majesty has been graciously pleased to call me, ought to direct his attention, is his own conduct, and example; so far at least, that by no positive neglect or demerit, the effect of his injunctions or exhortations may be lost upon you. Nor indeed, in regard to myself will this be quite sufficient to satisfy me in the hope of answering your just expectations; since, when I look back upon the great and distinguished Names of some of those who have heretofore filled this See, I cannot but have some fear lest you should be disposed to lament, that "the Race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong;" and become less inclined to listen with attention, to one whose humbler pretensions to Notice have only been called forth by "time and chance."

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But whatever impressions may be made upon my Mind by the situation in which I am placed, they do not leave me without good grounds of confidence that any deficiencies I possess may be supplied by your favourable reception of my endeavours; and that by mutual co-operation and assistance we may be enabled to contribute with effect our respective shares, to the common and important Cause in which we are all engaged. For, persuaded as I am that my good Fortune has thrown me among a Set (for the most part) of loyal and orthodox Clergy, I am assured that the good dispositions which your natural Candor would induce you to manifest towards the Person of any one placed at your head, will be increased and strengthened by an anxious desire to support that Order of things, and that System, of which he is a necessary part. A System, which taking root from the primitive and most apostolic times, has been so adapted to the fluctuating revolutions of human events, (in which even Religion, considered as to its external form, must necessarily be involved) as to answer best the purposes for which it was intended; and of which I trust it will not be too much to say,—(I am speaking of the whole Ecclesiastical Constitution of this Country,)—that allowance being made for the infirmities and imperfections of every thing human, it has been found during a time of sufficient experiment and thro' many trying Occasions, calculated to produce the greatest practicable good, checked by the least possible evil. And one ground of its merit, I conceive will be found in the Nature of its connection with the Civil Constitution. Neither the Slave, nor the Tyrant of the State, it adorns and strengthens the venerable Fabric to which it is joined; and to which it so closely adheres as to be inseparable without the destruction of both.

To the Support and Preservation of this united Constitution, and to the rendering it the instrument both of present and future happiness to those who live under it, we are all of us called in our respective Stations. And if ever there was a time when it could more peculiarly behove us to give attention to this call, it must surely be the present: when the Blessings of Order and regulated Government have been so signally experienced among us, in striking contrast to the miseries occasioned either by the desertion or abuse of them in the neighbouring Nations of Europe. To develop the Causes which have led to those Scenes of accumulated horror, to which we have been witness, under the utter extirpation and public disavowal of every religious principle; or to inquire how far any particular order of men may be supposed by their conduct to have contributed towards laying the foundation of them, would be a task of more difficulty in the investigation, than of certainty or perhaps of utility in the conclusion. Whether it be true or not, as has been insinuated, that the supineness and secularity of the French Clergy were among the Causes which paved the way for the astonishing Events we have seen, let us at least profit by the hint to frame our character and conduct in such a manner, as to avoid the danger of a similar reproach.—Nor let us be deficient in Charity, in our Judgments of these unfortunate Men. Many of them have perished amid the Wreck of their Country and their Religion, with a courage and resolution worthy of the primitive Martyrs: others despoiled of their property and driven to save their Lives by a hasty flight, have scarcely found a spot in Europe on which they have been permitted to set their foot, except in these hospitable Kingdoms; where we have seen them, for the most part, supporting these reverses of Fortune with patience and resignation, and submitting with exemplary calmness to the afflicting dispensations of Providence.

It must be confessed however that the arrival and abode of so many of these persecuted Strangers in this kingdom, has thrown a new and delicate task upon the Clergy in general; and especially in the places where they are permitted to remain. For whilst, under these circumstances we are unavoidably led rather to compassionate their distresses than to contemplate their errors, it is certainly incumbent on us not to suffer our vigilance to be relaxed in guarding against the insinuation of those tenets which corrupt and vitiate their Christianity. I would willingly hope that the particular occasions for this vigilance can be but few; and that under the imperious pressure of their present difficulties the intriguing Spirit of Popery will at length be at rest. But let us not mistake Confidence for Security; or suffer any advantage to be drawn from our own remissness or inattention. Thus much I have thought necessary to say on the Subject, lest I should appear to any one insensible of a Danger which seems by some to be apprehended, but which I am by no means disposed to magnify. At all Events, while you suffer not your compassion to warp you from your watchfulness over the Protestant Cause, let not on the other hand your humanity be deadened by groundless fears, and ill-founded suspicions. Place yourselves as nearly as may be in the situation of these Men; let them understand the terms upon which they must expect a continuance of your good Offices; and you will easily, I trust, be able to reconcile your particular Duty with the general Sentiments of Charity you must feel towards them.

I return however from this digression to the consideration of those subjects which the general character of our profession, and the particular circumstances of the present times, shall seem to suggest as the properest topics of communication between us. And here

here it must be obvious to remark, that in times of danger and alarm it is peculiarly necessary that every one should be found on his post. Nor indeed is this necessity confined to one order of Men, but reaches to all who have undertaken any charge for which they are answerable to the Public, or the faithful execution of which can any way contribute to the general good. But the particular point of view in which this remark is now introduced, you will easily imagine is in order to enforce the great obligation of the Clergy of all denominations to reside on their respective benefices; and especially to point out the many disadvantages arising from the non-residence of the Parochial Clergy. For as the enjoyment of those offices, whether civil or ecclesiastical, which are usually termed *Sinecures*, to which no Duty is properly annexed, but which are in fact applicable to many useful and desirable purposes, is nevertheless apt to be attended with much murmur and discontent from the world in general; so, much more may we expect that where emolument is annexed to the performance of duty, the latter will be looked for as the condition of the former. If the one be neglected it will too easily be argued that the other is unnecessary. Thus far therefore, from political motives alone, in regard to our own interest, and with a view to satisfy the public mind, we are called upon to shew ourselves properly in those respective stations in which we are placed. But when we come to apply this view of things to residence upon parochial Cures, it is astonishing what a multitude of considerations press upon the mind, to confirm and enforce the obligation. Not that I would be understood as meaning to lay down a rigid and inflexible rule, which must apply to all cases equally, and bend to no circumstances whatever; a rule totally inconsistent with the infirmities of human nature, and the fluctuating condition of affairs; but as wishing to enforce in all of you, and to create, if necessary, in the younger part of my audience, who

who perhaps may not have turned their thoughts to this matter with sufficient attention, a strong sense of the importance annexed to it. Let them reflect seriously upon what terms they were admitted into this Profession; and consider whether there is any other in which they would be able to neglect the Duty, whilst they receive the Emolument. In those of Law and Physic the advantages depend upon industry and employment in the line you undertake: the same also is the case in mercantile concerns, and in all trades and manufactures; those who engage in military professions, are not only forbidden by a Point of Honor to decline any Duty they are called to, but even solicit active and hazardous employment, in the midst of danger, and frequently even in noisome and unhealthy climates. If then, for the sake of securing respect and independence to the Clergy, the Constitution has wisely fixed their income upon a solid and permanent title, ought they to avail themselves of that circumstance to do less for it than they must do if it rested upon a more precarious footing? Or, if a sense of worldly honor can excite men to court danger and even death itself in defence of their King and Country, and in compliance with the duties of the Profession they have embraced, shall we suppose that no adequate motives are to be found to stimulate the Clergy to similar exertions? Let them reflect, not for the purposes of personal Vanity and Pride, but with a sober mind, let them reflect upon the real Value of their character and profession, and the importance of it to the maintenance of Order and Religion in this world, and consequently the attainment of eternal happiness in the next; let them consider the solemn manner in which they devoted themselves to it at their ordination, and the serious charge they accepted at their institution to their benefices; let them attentively call to mind these things, and I trust they will not suffer any light cause to detain them from a regular

regular and personal discharge of their duty. The principal difficulty however will be to estimate the validity of those excuses, with which men are apt to satisfy their own mind. Cases undoubtedly must occur, which will form exceptions to the general Rule; and in truth, the decision of these must rest principally with yourselves. Age and Infirmary; weak and precarious health; the means of providing for a numerous family; other Avocations and Engagements, not inconsistent with the Profession, perhaps even arising out of it; all these and other circumstances afford Pleas plausible in themselves, and to reject which would appear harsh and unreasonable; but from these, how ready may we be to slide insensibly into various other personal accommodations and concerns, difficult to be decided upon by another, but the impediments presented by which would probably vanish, before a mind strongly actuated by a desire of removing them, and a sense of the propriety of doing it. It is this desire and this sense which I wish forcibly to impress upon you: for though I hope I shall not be wanting in the proper exercise of the Authority committed to me, upon occasions that call for it, yet I shall ever deem it more advantageous to the Cause of Religion, as I am sure it will be more grateful to my own feelings, that any reformation which appears necessary should be brought about with your own concurrence and good will. Of those indeed who have been accustomed to desert their Cures merely through the Pursuit of Pleasure, or the Indolence of Dissipation, I trust very few will be found; and I am inclined to believe that such is the general sense of propriety on this head, that men of this description are looked upon with very little respect by their Brethren in general. But there is a Notion which prevails too much, and prevails, I fear, under the sanction of respectable authority^a, that if a Clergyman

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^a v. Paley's Moral Philosophy, chap. 14.—page 180-83.—Octavo. Edition.

does his Share of Duty, it is indifferent whether he perform it in his own Parish, or that of another.

I confess it appears to me, that a more effectual Bar cannot be placed against a general residence than such a concession as this. In the first place it is obvious that residence will thus for the most part be chosen in the healthiest, the most agreeable, and probably the gayest situations; those of a contrary description, will of course be deserted by the incumbent; it is well if they are not deserted by the Curate also; who in addition to the other objections against them, finds it necessary to accumulate duty in order to increase his income. Thus does one Evil beget another. But is the principle upon which the non-residence in this Case is founded, really just? Is there no special designation to the Cure of the Souls of those, who inhabit the particular Parish to which you are instituted? Shall we thus by our own Example confirm the People in the Habits they are too prone to acquire, of totally disregarding the relation between the Pastor and his Flock; and looking perhaps with more complacency to those self-commissioned teachers who obtrude themselves upon them, than to their regular and appointed Ministers? Yet this among others will be one probable Effect of being left to a Substitute. The natural Connection being dissolved, they will more readily consider themselves at liberty to form a new one.

Innumerable other instances will occur, where the good effects of our ecclesiastical Constitution, and of that most valuable part of it, a Parochial Ministry, will be weakened at least by the non-residence of the proper incumbent. If the income of the Living is to be increased, (and it behoves the Clergy, with proper temperance and moderation, to see that their revenues bear a due pro-

proportion to the improving revenues of the Country,) if this is to be done by an Absentee, how open does he lay himself to the reproach of looking more to the Emolument than to the Duties of his Situation!

It will perhaps be said that the ill-will too frequently created by such an Attempt, not being transferred to a Substitute, *He* may probably be able to exercise his Ministry among them with more effect. But it is our Duty to encounter all the difficulties which naturally arise from our situation; and it is to be hoped that by perseverance in a mild and temperate conduct, we may by degrees conquer the prejudices of our parishioners, and conciliate them to our just claims upon proper grounds. To the non-residence of the proper incumbent must also be attributed, what I am sorry to meet with in several parts of this Diocese, the decay and ruin of Parsonage-Houses. A succession of resident Ministers not only secures the necessary repairs, but generally ensures also a gradual and progressive improvement, keeping pace with the Spirit of the times. But on the contrary, when the buildings are untenanted, or even tenanted by a stranger, they are apt to become more and more dilapidated, till by degrees they are got past repair. The same happens in regard to the Lands. The Rector, having perhaps made his bargain for his Life, gives himself no farther trouble on behalf of his Successor; and if no Terrier has before been made, it is a chance but the boundaries become confused and the rights of the Living endangered or lost; as well as those benefactions which the piety of our ancestors have appropriated to the Church or to the Poor, but which the vigilant Attention of the Minister ought to have kept up. Nor is less vigilance and attention necessary in the Care of the Register; which in consequence of the non-residence of an Incumbent, is frequently

left to the hasty superintendence of a Curate, or even to the uncontrolled Care of the Parish Clerk; an evil too often manifested by the errors and omissions which have been found in them.

Of this also, especially with regard to Terriers, the Answers to my Queries afford too many examples.—It would be unjust however to quit this Subject, without expressing my Satisfaction at several recent instances of a conduct contrary to that above described; particularly, where the zeal and activity of new Incumbents have lost no time in making amends for the indolence of their predecessors; and rendering their Houses commodious and fit for residence. The Anxiety of the Legislature on this Subject has been manifested particularly by an Act of the 17th of his present Majesty, commonly known by the name of Mr. Gilbert's Act; by which the Incumbent is enabled, to a certain Point and under certain restrictions, to engage the income of the Living as a Fund for the gradual discharge of a Sum of Money raised for the purpose of building or repairing the House and premises. A Power, which tho' perhaps it may be deemed to go but little way, yet as far as it does go, certainly facilitates the business; (as I trust has been found in those instances where it has been tried;) and which I conceive to be well worthy the Attention of the Clergy.

But to conclude the subject of personal residence; if any influence is to be exerted; the sick visited; the profligate admonished; Parents to be induced to send their children to be catechised; the minds of the people to be reconciled to the unavoidable pressure of the times; their mistakes corrected and their prejudices removed; with how much more force will all this come from a Minister

Minister, whose residence has given him habits of intercourse with them, and whose situation gives him a natural interest in their Welfare!

To the Clergy themselves also many advantages will arise from a habit of exercising *all* the Duties of their Function; and still more, I conceive, from exercising them in their proper place. Indeed I have dwelt the longer on this Subject, because almost all the Admonitions I have to give to the younger Clergy are in a manner involved in it. For I cannot but believe that the dispositions I would wish to create in them, would naturally be either the cause or the effect of their viewing the obligations to residence in the light, in which I have endeavoured to place it. It would induce them not to think lightly of the Charge they have undertaken; it would give them a true sense of the importance of their Profession, and the necessity of conforming themselves to it in their lives and conversations. Without assuming a stiffness or formality, this conformity will manifest itself in matters of even an indifferent nature—in their dress—their manners—and their amusements; all of which will be so conducted, as without interrupting the ordinary intercourse of Life, to shew that they feel themselves engaged in a Task of higher import and concern.

But whatever impression I may wish to give you of the propriety of a personal residence, and the many advantages to be derived from it, yet there will be, as I observed before, some cases which will admit, perhaps even demand, an exception. And tho' I think the end can hardly ever be so effectually answered by a substitute, yet it is evident that in those cases it becomes the next duty, to see that provision should be made and care taken to render the substitute as effectual as possible. For this purpose,
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he should be made known and amenable to the Bishop of the Diocese, or the proper ordinary, by receiving his Licence; he should receive a competent Salary; and in cases which will any way admit of it, he should supply the residence of the Incumbent in the Parsonage-House. These are proper Objects of the Attention of the Bishop. To excite that Attention, and in some cases to render it more effectual, an Act of Parliament was passed in the reign of Queen Anne, the Powers of which have lately been enlarged, and explained in an Act, which passed the two Houses and received the Royal Assent during the last Session.

With respect to Licences, it has ever been much wished that every Curate employed, especially in the absence of the incumbent, should by these means be made known to the Ordinary and subject to his Jurisdiction. The exhibition of his Letters of Orders, and the production of a proper testimonial upon these occasions, affording the best security against the introduction of improper persons, and of those impositions, which have been heretofore but too frequently practised. But hitherto, a nomination from the incumbent has been deemed a necessary foundation for the Bishop's Licence; which either from indolence or design having been frequently neglected, the practice was getting into disuse; a door was opened for the introduction of adventurers without character, and the commission of irregularities which could not fall under the cognizance of the Ordinary. To remedy this, by rendering the practice of licencing Curates more constant and regular, the present Bill provides that it shall be in the Power of the Bishop to do it, without waiting for a Nomination from the incumbent. It is not to be supposed however that he will make any farther use of this Power, than to correct the negligence or wilfulness of those who for a continuance forbear to grant such a nomi-

nomination; or that he will arbitrarily interfere in the appointment of a Curate in any Case, where a proper Person is presented to him. And to take off the Objection which some incumbents have had to admitting a licenced Curate, from an apprehension that in case of disagreement or alteration of circumstances it would be difficult to get rid of him, even with the Assistance of the Bishop, if he thought proper to concur, the Power of the Diocesan to revoke his Licence whenever he sees fit, is recognized in the present Act, so as to be in future without dispute. There is indeed one Case in which an Incumbent may entail upon himself a Curate, from whom he would in vain wish to be freed; and that is, where he gives his nomination as a Title for Orders. But while a Regard to his own Interest dictates to him a Caution on this head, lest the appointment should turn out to his own prejudice, it ought to suggest to him an equal scrupulousness, where he conceives himself secure, lest he either introduce an improper person into the Church, or become accessory to a fraud upon the Bishop by any evasive or collusive nomination.

In both these cases of granting Licences without a nomination, and revoking them at will, a large discretion has been thought to be given to the Bishop. But since all Power, vested in human hands, is liable to abuse, his decision in both is rendered subject to an Appeal to the Metropolitan. The Clergy will easily perceive that they will gain nothing by frequent and vexatious appeals; but should any case occur which may fairly justify it, I am sure that I, for one, rejoice such appeal exists.

On the whole then I conceive that this Provision respecting Licences, as it now stands, will be found conducive to
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the preservation of good Order and Discipline in the Church, without being liable to any Objection either from the incumbent or curate.

As to the second Point, namely, the Salaries of Curates, by the former Act the Bishop was empowered to fix them as far as a certain Point; which the latter has extended to a larger Sum, upon two principles. First, that on account of the increased Price of every Article of Life, what was at that time a competence cannot be deemed so now; and secondly, that the Livings in general having been improved, it was thought fit the Salaries of the Curates should continue to bear the same proportion to them. And I trust it will be well taken that amidst the arduous and important Objects which at this time demand their care, the Legislature has not been inattentive to the welfare of this useful and laborious set of Men. But to prevent any unreasonable or ill-founded expectations, it is necessary to observe that the discretion of the Bishop is to be governed in all Cases by the Rule laid down in the Act of Queen Anne, and recited in the new Act, namely, that in fixing the Salary, "Regard must be had to the greatness of the Cure and the Value of the Benefice." And under these restrictions, I am inclined to think that this part of the new Act can have but little if any Operation in this Diocese; for as far as I can perceive by the returns made to my Queries, the Salaries are in general below the Point to which they might have been carried by the Act of Queen Anne; which I am willing to persuade myself would not be the Case, unless the income of the Livings was in general small. But it will be my Duty to inform myself more fully on this head, and give directions accordingly, where the case may require it.

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With regard to the other Clause of the Act, namely, that which enjoins that, in addition to the Salary, the Curate may, if convenient, be accommodated with the Use of the Parsonage-House, I feel myself disposed to give to it all the Efficacy in my Power; conceiving that where unfortunately the proper incumbent cannot reside, the best Cure for the Evil (tho' by no means a complete one) is the residence of a Curate: and considering also, that the House is properly destined not merely to enhance the Value of a Living, but to afford a residence to an officiating minister. These cases however, like all others, must also be governed by circumstances; and indeed the Act itself contains various restrictions and regulations, as to the time for which this indulgence may be granted, and the mode of its removal or suspension. But on the whole, I consider it as a very proper clause; and I have confident hope, that whatever I may find necessary to recommend on these occasions, will be received by you with good-will and ready compliance.

By the remaining Clauses of the late Act, the Provisions above-mentioned are extended to those Benefices which are usually called Perpetual Curacies, or Donatives, whether they have or have not been augmented by Queen Anne's Bounty. The reason of the thing seeming to require, that if these provisions are proper in themselves, they should be made as extensive as possible in their operation.

These are the Observations which it has occurred to me to make upon an Act, in which you are so much concerned, that it was necessary you should be made acquainted with it; which has at the same time given me an opportunity of discussing the principal topics I could have wished to offer to your notice

on this Occasion. If I have hitherto said nothing to the younger Clergy, of the prosecution of their Studies, it is because I wished in the first place to secure that which alone can give value to them, namely, good morals, and a right intention. But the same turn of mind which will tend to form the proper sentiments and character in you, will point out the prosecution of your studies, especially in the Line of your Profession, not only as the most rational and fittest employment of your leisure time, but as a part also of the Engagement you entered into when you were admitted into the Ministry. And indeed it is on this ground only, that when all other circumstances are favourable, we accept some times of a very small Proficiency in Literature, in the hope and confidence that the Progress will be carried on and completed in future. Any particular directions as to the Method of this, can neither come within the compass of the present Address, nor are much wanted in a diocese where most of the Candidates have received the advantage of an Academical Education; to ensure however the benefits of that advantage, I wish it to be as generally understood as possible, that it will be expected of those who come to me for ordination, to bring with them a testimonial of their attendance on the Divinity Lectures in the respective Universities to which they belong.

Under this influence, I would hope that their Learning when applied to the common duties of their Profession, will become sound, simple and rational: calculated to take such hold of the people, as to guard them, tho' in the Spirit of Christian Charity, not only against the prejudices of those who have long separated from us, but against the attempts also of bold and forward enthusiasts; to make them content to walk in the good old Path which
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their Forefathers have trod, notwithstanding the offers of weak and self-sufficient Guides to conduct them into new ones.

What remains for the present, may, I hope, be completed between us from time to time by correspondence and personal intercourse, which it will ever be my wish and desire to encourage in all cases, where, by Advice or Assistance, I can hope to be of any use. I regret, that other unavoidable engagements of duty, will necessarily detain me greatly from my Diocese ; but I beg leave to assure you, that I have nothing nearer my Heart than to be enabled so to conduct the affairs of it, as to combine the Consciousness of having done my Duty with your Approbation of my Endeavours.— To this end, I shall always be ready to receive your Information, to listen to your Counsel, and to co-operate with you in any measure which may tend to the general Good : trusting at the same time, that should any Act of Authority be at any time called for to coerce the Refractory, or reclaim the Profligate, I shall be supported in the painful but necessary exercise of it by your countenance and assistance.

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their Forefathers have used, notwithstanding the efforts of weak and inefficient Guides to conduct them into new ones.

What remains for the present, may, I hope, be completed between us from time to time by correspondence and personal intercourse, which it will ever be my wish and desire to encourage in all cases, where, by Advice or Assistance, I can hope to be of any use. I regret, that other unavoidable engagements of duty, will necessarily detain me greatly from my Discretions; but I beg leave to assure you, that I have nothing nearer my Heart than to be enabled to conduct the affairs of it, as to combine the Consideration of having done my Duty with your Approbation of my Conduct. To this end, I shall always be ready to receive your Instructions, to listen to your Councils, and to comply with you in any measure which may tend to the general Good of the Society, that should any Act of Authority be necessary, called for to correct the Refractory, or restrain the Profligate, I shall be prepared to the painful but necessary exercise of it by your Countenance and Assistance.

THE END.